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AUTHOR Sarangi, Usha
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ABSTRACT

This report describes methodological problems encountered in categorizing or coding responses to a questionnaire. The survey in question was designed to investigate the problems encountered by language teachers in two African countries in teaching large classes. The key analysis was of the responses to two survey items: "Large classes make it difficult for me to do what I would like to do because..." and "With an ideal number of students in my class, I could...". Analysis of the responses was in five stages: coding; defining three categories for classification of responses (effect, affect, and effort); finding correlations between the two questions; drawing up the first chart of responses; and elaborating the classification system. All of the data from South African teachers were analyzed first; next, data from Senegalese teachers were processed. The dilemma of how to accommodate all responses without distorting or omitting data was resolved by approaching categorizing questionnaire responses from the respondents' point of view rather than imposing a rigid system of analysis. This approach allowed the researchers to account for virtually all responses. One disadvantage was the resulting large number of categories and subcategories. The questionnaire and charts illustrating the classification system are appended. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE LEARNING IN LARGE CLASSES

RESEARCH PROJECT

# A CONSIDERATION OF METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN ANALYSING THE PROBLEMS OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN LARGE CLASSES

USHA SARANGI

PROJECT REPORT NO. 10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Usha Sarangi
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**Lancaster-Leeds**
**Language Learning in Large Classes**
**Research Project**

Overseas Education Unit
School of Education
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
U.K.

Tel : 0532-334569
Telex : 556473 UNILDS G
Fax : 0532-336017

Department of Linguistics
and Modern English Language
University of Lancaster
Lancaster LA1 4YT
U.K.

Tel : 0524-65201
Telex : 65111 LANCUL G
Fax : 0524-63806

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report is a brief account of the work done by the Language Learning in Large Classes option group which met in Lancaster during the academic session 1987-88 under the supervision of Dick Allwright. The group's main focus was the second of the questionnaires designed by the Lancaster-Leeds Language Learning in Large Classes Research Project. This questionnaire investigates the problems which language teachers experience in large classes.(1)

Our primary concern was a methodological one. The account which follows details the entire process which the group went through in trying to evolve a category system which could accommodate all the questionnaire responses but without distorting or omitting any of the data. The group's long term goal, however, was to ensure that the outcome would assist future researchers in analysing similar data from other countries.

## 1.2 Data

Before I go on to discuss the process which we went through and the methodological difficulties which we encountered in evolving

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a new category system (Sections 2.1-2.5), I shall first describe our data base. The data which we used for our analysis were provided by teachers from two African countries. Our choice of these two sets of data had no particular justification, except that they were at hand and the numbers of responses were reasonable. Our approach was also in line with that adopted by other researchers associated with the Lancaster-Leeds Language Learning in Large Classes Research Project, in that, by analysing data on a country-by-country basis, we hoped that ultimately this would highlight distinctive trends in large classes in different parts of the world.

The data consisted of 10 questionnaires completed by a group of respondents in Sénégal (mostly secondary school teachers) and 15 filled in by a group of South African educationists (mostly primary school teachers) who were attending a short course at the University of Leeds. This second set of data has already been analysed by Peachey (Project Report No. 8), but our work differs in that our concern was to develop a chart or framework to help future analysis of similar data. The Sénégal data were used in all five stages of the analytical process (see Sections 2.1-2.5 below), whilst the South African responses were used only in Stage 5 (Section 2.5).

Though our original aim was to analyse responses to all the questions in the questionnaire, in fact we were able to make use of only the first two questions : 'Large classes make it

difficult for me to do what I would like to do because ...' and 'With an ideal number of students in my class, I could ...' The responses to these two questions, as one would expect, were similar in nature but tended to be the mirror images of each other.

## 2 The Analytical Process

The process which is described here consists of five stages : coding, defining, correlating, preparing Chart One and preparing Chart Two.

### 2.1 Stage 1 : Coding

Before beginning the analysis itself, we introduced a coding system as a way of imposing order on the rather diverse and varied responses. To begin with, we copied out each response provided by the Sénégal teachers onto a separate reference card. Figure 1 is an illustration of what a card looked like after entries had been made.

The coding system needs explanation. In the top left-hand corner of the card we filled in the questionnaire number (which is 'II' in this case) followed by the number of the question which we were working on. (Here the second question is indicated

| II/2 | SE1/2 |
|---|---|
| Give more time to individual practice | |

Figure 1 *Example of a completed card*

by '2'.) Then, in the top right-hand corner, a code indicates the country of origin of the respondent. (The initials 'SE' in Figure 1 thus represent Sénégal, whilst 'SA' indicates a response from one of the South African teachers.) Each completed questionnaire was then assigned a number, so that '1' immediately after 'SE' refers to the first respondent from the group of ten. Next, it was necessary to number individual comments, since most respondents made several responses - in the form of a list - to each question. (In the example, the '2' indicates that this is the second response to this particular question provided by this individual respondent.) Finally, in certain instances, a particular response contained more than one proposition. In these cases, we wrote out the same response on different cards, underlined the proposition, and entered 'a', 'b', etc after the number of the response. (In the above example, if we had considered 'time' to be one proposition and 'individual practice' another then we would have prepared two cards. The code in the top right hand corner would have been SE1/2a on one card and

SE1/2b on the other, but the same response would have been written in the lower part of both cards.)

We recorded every response from the Sénégal respondents on cards and coded each one using the system described here. These cards then provided the basis for the categorisation of responses.

## 2.2 Stage 2 : The definitional issue

Having coded all the data, we intended to move on immediately to an analysis. As a starting point, we tried to analyse the responses to the first question in the questionnaire using the 'Effect', 'Affect', and 'Effort' categories suggested by McLeod (Project Report No. 7). But, just as McLeod had experienced difficulty, we too found problems in trying to use these categories. On the one hand, they could not accommodate all responses to the first question. On the other hand, the categories were too broad and overlapping, so that some of the responses seemed to fall under more than one category. Consider, for instance, the following response :

> The large number of students would make it difficult for me to control the work and progress of each individual student.

How is this statement to be classified in McLeod's system? Another example is the following :

> I may spend, and certainly will spend, the whole year without knowing my students' names ... Knowing pupil's name is of great importance in our culture.

This response could, in fact, be classified under all three categories of Effect, Affect and Effort.

As we tried to classify the responses we found that nearly 30% did not belong to any of the three categories. Consequently, more categories were called for. There was also a problem in deciding what the three categories really included. So, leaving aside for the time being those responses which did not conform to this category system at all, at this point we felt that it would be helpful to arrive at operational definitions of McLeod's three categories. This, in turn, would help us to identify and classify all the responses. The definitions upon which we eventually agreed are as follows :

**Effect.** Effect may be viewed as a concern with the effectiveness of the activities which the teacher has carried out in the form of providing input (such as listening, speaking, reading, or writing activities, evaluation to get feedback, etc). A difficulty in the area of Effect indicates that the teacher is unhappy about not being able to give attention to each and every student in class during these activities.

**Affect.** Affect concerns everything that, in the classroom, touches the psychological feelings of the teacher in relation to his/her personal relationship with the learners and the working environment. Prototypical cases of difficulty in Affect include the following : identity (not knowing individual learners' names), the material situation (feeling physically uncomfortable in the classroom), and the general teaching climate (feeling nervous).

**Effort.** Effort concerns the amount of work required for the teacher to perform a task. The following are examples of difficulty in this area. It may be difficult for the teacher to control what goes on in the classroom and, more specifically, to keep a tab on the progress of individual students. Detailed marking is difficult to accomplish and this invariably results in lack of detailed feedback to the students. Evaluation work on both oral and written activities has to be reduced and

> the tendency is to give tasks that are easier to mark. The tasks, in such circumstances, may not be the most useful in pedagogical terms.

Even after arriving at these definitions of each of McLeod's categories, we realised that these concepts were still too close and overlapping. At this stage we felt that it was necessary to find a completely new category system which would be more flexible and elaborate and which would account for all the questionnaire responses.

## 2.3 Stage 3 : Finding correlations between Questions 1 and 2

As has already been noted, nearly 30% of the responses to the first question were problematic and difficult to categorise. We tried to resolve this difficulty by comparing them to those given to the second question. This proved to be helpful, and so we decided to try to analyse responses to the second question first before going any further with responses to the first question. The justification for doing this was that it might help us to work towards a classification system for the first question.

Most of the responses to the second question paralleled those given to the first question. They were, in most cases, a repetition of the activities mentioned under the first question, as is evident from the following response :

(I can) do the above activities more easily and effectively (as mentioned in question one).

In order to identify new categories our first task was to look back through all the responses, making use of the coded cards (Section 2.1 above). As we read out each response from the cards we noted down the key words or phrases. Let me illustrate this point a little further. If we take, for instance, the response filled in on the card shown in Figure 1, the key words or phrases were 'individual practice' and 'time'.

The majority of responses appeared to constitute either complaints about problems or comments on something which the teacher felt could be improved upon if classes were of an ideal size. Thus ***complaint*** and ***area for improvement*** began to emerge as criteria for the classification of responses. Looking back again to the response shown in Figure 1, the concern with 'time' seems to fall into the area of complaint, whereas the issue of 'individual practice' can be seen as a potential area of improvement. The development of this distinction enabled us to move on to the next stage of the analytical process.

## 2.4 Stage 4 : Drawing up Chart One

This stage marks the most crucial point in our analysis. At this point we struggled to draw up our first chart (see Appendix 2).

Under the area of 'Complaint' we prepared five columns :

1 Time
2 Effort/workload
3 Space
4 Resources, and
5 Responses that did not spell out any complaint.

Areas of improvement are indicated on the left hand side of the chart. Under this category we originally had five sub-categories, as follows :

A ∅. This is a blank row for responses which did not mention any specific area for improvement.

B Reaching maximum number of learners. This category is for responses which dealt with individual attention in terms of giving more time to each student, individual practice, getting all involved, etc.

C Group work organisation. Responses mentioning group work are classified here.

D Personal relationships. This is a category for responses dealing with the teacher-student relationship.

E Productive skills. Responses mentioning oral or written skills are placed in this category.

Having identified these five potential areas for improvement, we attempted to categorise all the questionnaire responses using this system. In the process, however, we discovered that the original list of five sub-categories was inadequate and so we added the following[2] :

F Pedagogy. This sub-category deals directly with teaching methods and activities (e.g. 'using pedagogical methods with ease and efficiency').

G Feedback. This improvement area is concerned with evaluation.

H Order and discipline. The final area of improvement is concerned with classroom control and management.

Let us look back once again at the example in Figure 1 to see how the system was implemented. The complete code for this response was 'II/2 SE1/2'. Since we were looking only at responses to the second question from the second questionnaire, it was not necessary to use the questionnaire/question code (II/2) in the chart. Similarly, since only the Sénégal responses were being dealt with at this point, it was unnecessary to use the 'SE' country code. We therefore needed only to use the participant/response code from the top right hand corner of the card. As we have seen, this was '1/2', indicating that this was the second response provided by the first respondent. Chart One (Appendix 2) shows that we placed this particular response in Row B (Reaching maximum number of learners) and Column 1 (Time). At this point, we returned to the cards and recorded on them the Complaint/Improvement code for each response. In this case the code was 1B, indicating that the response had been plotted under Complaint 1 (Time) and Improvement Area B (Reaching maximum number of learners).

However, as we went through all the responses and coded them according to the new system, we found that we still faced problems similar to those encountered when we originally tried to apply McLeod's categories to our data. This, we felt, was because the categories were still too broad. Examine, for

instance, some of the responses which we categorised under Improvement Area B (Reaching maximum number of learners) :

1(1) devote more time to each student and screen him/her more closely

4(4) supply each student with appropriate material

5(1) insist more on individual repetition

10(6b) ensure a correct pronunciation from each student.

We can see clearly that although these responses are similar in that they are all concerned with individual learners, yet they are also different from each other. While response 1(1) is about progress, 4(4) is about the provision of materials, 5(1) is concerned with opportunities to participate in repetition activities, and, finally, 10(6b) is about pronunciation. We felt that we were not doing justice to the responses by classifying them all under the same category. By doing this we were ignoring some of the information which the responses carried.

This realisation took us to the fifth and final stage of the analytical process.

2.5 Stage 5 : Towards a more elaborate category system

It seemed, then, that Chart One was inadequate in that the categories of Potential Areas for Improvement were still too broad and too rigid for the data. What we needed now were more

sub-categories. So we went through all the data once more, focussing on the key words in the responses. This led to the creation of a more elaborate category system, which is displayed in Chart Two, Tables 1-7 (Appendix 3).

Chart Two shows how responses were reclassified using a much more elaborate system based on five different categories of Improvement Area. Some of these categories were sub-divided, and each category was made up of between 2 and 9 Improvement Areas. The five categories are as follows :

1 Physical environment-related. This category is further divided into 'Space' (Table 1) and 'Materials' (Table 2). The Improvement Areas falling into this broad category are display, mobility, arrangement, quantity and appropriacy.

2 Activity-related. This category is also subdivided, in this case into matters concerned with discipline ('Control', Table 3) and those dealing with actual teaching ('Language Pedagogy', Table 4). The Improvement Areas are ability to manage, identifying leaders, discipline, grouping, evaluation/feedback, outside activities, appropriacy of tasks, remedial work, parental involvement, task-related grouping, more activities, and child-centred pedagogy.

3 Learner-related. This is a very important category, consisting of the following Improvement Areas : levels, abilities, needs/problems, strategies, individual attention, child-centred learning, and motivation/participation (see Table 5).

4 Teacher-related. Responses falling into this category were concerned directly with teachers' personal feelings in teaching large classes (Table 6). There are six Improvement Areas : job satisfaction, knowing learners, self-evaluation, preparation, teacher-learner relationships, and feeling comfortable or at ease in the classroom.

5 Achievement-related. Responses dealing with teachers' aims are classified here (Table 7). The specific Areas for Improvement are aims, skills, expectations, learner independence, and education for life.

Once we had decided upon this framework we wanted to test it using a new set of data. It is at this point that we turned to the South African data (Section 1.2 above). We found that the new set of tables in Chart Two were much more flexible and suitable and that they could account for almost 90% of the responses. A few responses which continued to be problematic were either ambiguous or were very general in nature, such as 'do more work than I am doing today' and 'make teaching more effective'.

After we had gone through all the South African data we went back to the Sénégal data once more and tried to apply the new category system to it. We found that the new system could accommodate all the responses from the Sénégal questionnaires. Tables 1-7 in Chart Two incorporate both the South African (SA) and the Sénégal (SE) responses.

## 3 Conclusion

This report has offered a chronological account of the collaborative work done by a group as it moved through five distinct stages of an analytical process. I have highlighted some of the practical difficulties which the group faced in the process of evolving its category system. Rather than impose a rigid framework - as exemplified by McLeod's system of analysis - we approached the problem of categorising questionnaire responses

from the respondents' point of view. That is to say, we evolved categories on the basis of the actual responses and this gave us the advantage of being able (eventually) to account for practically all the responses with which we were dealing.

Nevertheless, this methodology is not without its shortcomings. The most conspicuous of these is that we have ended up with a very large number of categories and sub-categories.

The new framework has been tried out with two sets of data. It should not, however, be thought of as an immutable system. By its very nature, new categories could well be required if the system were to be applied to different data sets, although it is hoped that the overall system itself would continue to be valid.(3)

**Notes**

1 This has come to be known as the 'Difficulties' questionnaire. It has been used and discussed by LoCastro, in Project Report No. 5, with data from Japan; by Coleman, in Project Report No. 6, with data from Nigeria; by McLeod, Project Report No. 7, with data from a number of countries; by Peachey, using responses from South Africa, in Project Report No. 8; and by Sabandar with respondents in Indonesia in Project Report No.9.

2 An important difference between McLeod's categorisation system (Project Report No. 7) and our own is that our list was open-ended and allowed us to create new sub-categories as required to accommodate new data.

3 The framework described here was used only with responses to the second question from the questionnaire ('With an ideal number of students in my class, I could ...'). However, we suspect that it would not be difficult to employ the same framework for analysis of responses to the first question ('Large classes make it difficult for me to do what I would like to do because ...').

**Appendix 1 : Questionnaire**

Many teachers say that teaching English in large classes is a problem for them. But in what way are large classes a problem? How do large classes stop teachers from doing what they would like to do? Your responses to this questionnaire will help us to answer these questions.

Under each of the following, please list as many points as you can.

1 **Large classes** make it difficult for me to do what I would like to do because :

2 With an **ideal** number of students in my class, I could :

3 When I am teaching a **large class**, I help my students to learn English by :

4 Do you have any other comments or questions about teaching and learning in **large classes**?

5 Is the institution you teach in (please ring the appropriate letter) :

primary/elementary? a
secondary? b
college/university? c
other (please specify)? d

6 In principle, would you be willing to help us with future research into large classes (perhaps by responding to another questionnaire)?

**YES/NO**

Thank you very much for your help.

**Appendix 2 : Chart One**

| Potential Area for Improvement | Complaint 1 Time | 2 Effort/ Workload | 3 Space | 4 Resources | 5 ∅ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A ∅ | — | 1(3b), 5(7), 10(5) | — | — | — |
| B Reaching maximum number of learners | 1(1), 1(2), 5(5) | — | — | 4(4) | 2(4), 3(1), 4(3), 4(8), 5(1), 10(1a), 10(6b) |
| C Group work organisation | — | — | 2(2a) | — | 2(2b), 4(5b), 10(10) |
| D Personal relationships | — | — | — | — | 6(2a), 10(4) |
| E Productive skills | — | 1(3a) | — | — | 4(1), 4(5a), 10(6a) |
| F Pedagogy (methods, other activities) | — | 4(7a), 4(7b) | — | — | 2(3), 4(2), 5(2), 5(8) |
| G Feedback | — | 6(3) | — | — | — |
| H Order and discipline | — | — | — | — | 5(3), 6(2c), 6(4), 10(3c) |

**Appendix 3 : Chart Two, Tables 1 - 7**

Table 1 *Improvement Area : Physical environment-related : Space*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 ∅ | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Display work | SA6(5) | — | SA2(6) | — | SA9(4a) |
| B Mobility | SA4(1b)<br>SA6(b)<br>SA10(5) | — | — | — | — |
| C Arrangement | SA5(10a)<br>SA12(2) | — | — | — | SA7(4)<br>SA9(4b) |

Table 2 *Improvement Area : Physical environment-related : Materials*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 ∅ | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Quantity | — | — | — | SA12(5)<br>SE2(2) | — |
| B Appropriacy | — | — | — | SE4(4) | — |

Table 3 *Improvement Area : Activity-related : Control*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 ∅ | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
| A Ability to manage | SA1(4)<br>SA5(1b)<br>SA9(2a)<br>SA10(1b)<br>SA12(4)<br>SA13(3) | — | — | — | SE8(3a) |
| B Identifying leaders | SA5(5) | — | — | — | — |
| C Discipline | SE5(3)<br>SE6(2c)<br>SE6(4)<br>SE10(3b) | — | — | — | — |

Table 4 *Improvement Area : Activity-related : Language pedagogy*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 ∞ | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Grouping | SA3(1)<br>SA5(a)<br>SA6(1a)<br>SA7(3)<br>SA15(1)<br>SA10(6a)<br>SA12(3)<br>SE7(2)<br>SE8(4a)<br>SE9(4a) | — | — | — | — |
| B Evaluation/ feedback | SA8(3a)<br>SA9(2b)<br>SA10(6)<br>SE5(7) | SA5(7)<br>SE6(3) | SA6(3)<br>SA14(2)<br>SE8(4b) | — | — |
| C Outside activities | SA2(4)<br>SE7(4)<br>SE8(6) | — | — | — | — |
| D Appropriacy of tasks | SA10(3a) | — | — | — | — |
| E Remedial work | SA1(5b)<br>SA10(2)<br>SA15(2)<br>SE4(8b) | — | — | — | — |
| F Parental involvement | SA2(5) | — | — | — | — |
| G Task-related grouping | SA4(1a)<br>SE4(5) | — | — | — | SE1(2) |
| H More activities | SA5(6)<br>SA10(3b)<br>SE5(2a)<br>SE9(4b) | — | SE5(6) | — | — |
| I Child-centred pedagogy | SA5(10b)<br>SA6(2)<br>SA14(5) | — | — | — | — |

Table 5 *Improvement Area : Learner-related*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 ∅ | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Levels | SA1(3a)<br>SA8(7)<br>SA10(7)<br>SE4(9) | — | — | — | — |
| B Abilities | SA1(2)<br>SA2(8) | — | SE1(1a) | SA4(2a) | — |
| C Needs/ problems | SA1(5a)<br>SA2(2)<br>SA4(2b)<br>SA8(3b)<br>SA9(3b)<br>SA10(4)<br>SA14(4)<br>SE4(8a)<br>SE9(2)<br>SE9(3) | SA5(2) | — | SA6(4) | — |
| D Strategies | SA11(2) | — | SA4(3) | — | — |
| E Individual attention | SA6(1b)<br>SA7(1)<br>SA8(4)<br>SA12(1)<br>SA13(1)<br>SA14(3)<br>SE2(4)<br>SE4(3)<br>SE8(2a) | — | SA1(1)<br>SA5(3)<br>SA9(1)<br>SA10(1)<br>SA11(1)<br>SE1(1b)<br>SE5(5) | — | — |
| F Child-centred learning | SA5(9) | — | — | — | — |
| G Motivation/ participation | SE3(1)<br>SE4(6)<br>SE6(2b)<br>SE7(3)<br>SE7(5) | — | — | — | — |

Table 6 *Improvement Area : Teacher-related*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 [illegible] | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Job satisfaction | SA7(2)<br>SA8(5) | — | — | — | — |
| B Knowing learners | SA9(3a)<br>SA13(2)<br>SE6(2a)<br>SE7(1)<br>SE9(1) | — | — | — | — |
| C Self-evaluation | SA8(2) | — | SE5(8) | — | — |
| D Preparation | SA14(1) | — | SA2(1)<br>SA4(2c) | — | — |
| E Teacher-learner relationships | SA5(8)<br>SE10(4) | — | — | — | — |
| F Comfortable/ at ease | SE10(2) | SE10(5) | — | — | — |

Table 7 *Improvement Area : Achievement-related*

| Improvement Area | Problem Source 1 [illegible] | 2 Workload | 3 Time | 4 Resources | 5 Space |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Aims | SA8(1)<br>SE2(3) | — | — | — | — |
| B Skills | SE4(1)<br>SE5(2b)<br>SE10(1)<br>SE10(3a) | SE1(3) | SA5(4) | — | — |
| C Expectations | SA1(3b) | — | — | — | — |
| D Learner independence | SA2(9a) | — | — | — | — |
| E Education for life | SA2(9b) | — | — | — | — |

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Hywel Coleman
Overseas Education Unit
School of Education
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
U.K.

Tel : 0532-334569
Telex : 556473 UNILDS G
Fax : 0532-336017

Dick Allwright
Department of Linguistics
and Modern English Language
University of Lancaster
Lancaster LA1 4YT
U.K.

Tel : 0524-65201
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**LANCASTER - LEEDS**
**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN LARGE CLASSES**
**RESEARCH PROJECT**

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